

REPLY TO THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY,  
DECLARING THE CONTRACT WITH MR. ROACH

**INOPERATIVE.**  
WASHINGTON, July 12. — Attorney-General

Garland has rendered a decision on the three points relative to the acceptance of the Dolphin by the Government submitted to him by Secretary Whitney. The Attorney-General holds that the vessel cannot be accepted by the Secretary of the Navy; that no valid contract exists between John Roach and the Government, and that the large sum of money paid to him for the vessel may be recovered. Mr. Garland's opinion is as follows:

"Your communication of the 17th requests my opinion as to the rights and duties of the United States touching the Dolphin, under the contract just entered into between John Roach, under the name of the Dolphin recently constructed by John Roach, under the name of the Dolphin, and the Government, and your predecessor, William E. Chandler. This vessel, you inform me, has been found to be defective."

Three particular, two of which are fundamental; that is to say, she does not develop the power and speed which the contract calls for; she is not staunch and stiff enough for the service expected of her; and the general character of her workmanship does not come up to the requirements of the contract.

"As to the defect in the article of speed, the act of Congress under which the vessel was built makes an appropriation for the construction of 'one dispatch boat, as recommended by the Naval Advisory Board.' In its report of December 20, 1892, 'Upon reference to that report it will be found, as I am informed by you, that the Board recommended the construction of 'one dispatch vessel or clipper, to have a sea speed of fifteen knots'; and I take it as very clear that the recommendation became, by force of this reference, a part of the statute as though it had been recited therein in express words.

"The contract contains no express covenant as to the speed of the vessel—unless one is necessarily involved in the stipulation for a 'collective indicated horse-

power' of two thousand, three hundred—but its very first covenant is to construct a dispatch boat 'in conformity with the aforesaid plans and specifications here-to annexed, and in accordance with the provisions of the acts of Congress approved on August 5 and March 3, 1883, respectively before mentioned and relating thereto,' and I am of the opinion that this covenant bound the

contractor as effectively to make a ship of the sea speeded to fifteen knots" as though he had agreed to do so in exchange for press words. It may be said, possibly, that the covenantant was made as to power and speed is not absolute, but is qualified by the provision that, if upon the trial trip the engines should not develop the full power called for by the contract, and the failure should not be due to "defective workmanship or materials," the ship should be accepted by the Government nevertheless.

"This attempt to bind the Government to take from the contractor's hands a ship of less power and speed than what the act of Congress peremptorily requires, is in my opinion utterly null and without effect. It was to that effect accepted by the Government nevertheless."

quality of speed more than to any other that Congress was looking, as the terms 'dispatch vessel or clipper' used in the report of the Advisory Board referred to in the law plainly show. Congress deemed that the service required a swift vessel of a sea speed of fifteen knots, and it directed such a vessel to be contracted for and built. The contractor cannot be heard to allege ignorance of the law under which the contract was made.

He was bound to know the source and extent of the authority of the official with whom he contracted. Individuals as well as courts.

say the Supreme Court, "must take notice of the extent of authority conferred by law upon a person acting in an official capacity, and the rule applies in such a case that ignorance of the law furnishes no ex-

"With a full knowledge of the statute authorizing the construction of a dispatch boat of a designated speed, and no other, and with the plans and specifications under which the work was to be done laid before him that he might aid with intelligence and safety, the contractor, if he had misgivings whether a vessel planned like the Delphin could make the required speed, should have

abstained from sending in proposals, knowing as he did, or ought to have done, that a ship defective in point of speed could not be accepted under the statute, whatever her merits might be in other respects. Under any other view the most imperative requirements of Congress would be liable at all times to be evaded upon one pretext or another. I cannot conceive how it could be so.

iously urged that the United States is bound under the law in question to accept from the contractor any other sort of vessel than the one ordered by Congress to be built, namely, a dispatch boat or clipper of sea speed of fifteen knots, and the Dolphin having been found not to be a vessel of that description, as I must assume, it would seem to follow that nothing short of an act of Congress would authorize her acceptance.

"I come now to consider the next objection, that the vessel is wanting in the necessary strength and stiffness. If this defect exist, as I must assume, it is fatal, whether due to the plans upon which the vessel was built or not, because, by the ninth clause of the contract the contractor and his sureties stipulate 'that the vessel constructed under this contract shall be sufficiently strong

to carry the armament, equipment, coal, stores and machinery prescribed by the Naval Advisory Board and indicated by the annexed drawings and specifications. Now, it is too plain for serious discussion that the contractor has, by this covenant, undertaken to make a ship for a specific purpose in accordance with given drawings and specifications and has, to all intents

and purpose, warranted that the ship so agreed to be built shall be "sufficiently strong" for that purpose. In a word, the contractor, by this covenant makes the plans of the Advisory Board his own and agrees to construct a vessel of sufficient strength according to those plans. Manifestly, then, the Dolphin which I am bound to assume in view of the report accompanying your communication is anything but

"The third objection, as to the general character of the workmanship of the vessel, I need not stop to consider in view of your representation that, if the vessel is otherwise in accordance with the contract, this objection

" As to whether the Government has been in anywise  
 estopped or compromised by acts of acquiescence, ap-  
 proved or acceptance by the Advisory Board or others, I  
 am of opinion that the Government stands unaffected  
 by such acts. This must be the case, necessarily,

if the law authorizing the building of a dispatch boat is to have effect. Its language is that 'no such vessel shall be accepted unless completed in strict conformity with the contract, with the advice and assistance of the Naval Advisory Board,' and consequently no acceptance of a vessel not built in 'strict conformity with the contract,' could bind the Government. Neither the Secretary of the Navy nor any officer under him had any authority under this statute, the words of which, as neither power over this statute, the words of which, as

appearing as the doer in a context displaying great solicitude for the protection of the public interests, cannot be taken in any other sense than as mandatory without a plain disregard of the legislative intention. The power to accept a ship built under this law cannot be exercised unless the fact be that the ship was constructed in strict conformity with the contract, and the mere re-enunciation from any official quarter that the ship was so constructed what in truth it was not, is to establish whatever is a pretended act of acceptance.

ance. It was said that the intention of Congress that the United States should be foreclosed or precluded in any such way, or that any departure from the contract except as specially provided for should be condoned by the act or judgment of any official, and that it should be open at all times to show that a vessel alleged to have been built and accepted under the law was not so built and accepted. It was competent for Congress to create an extraordinary barrier of this kind against fraud and imposture, but it is the duty of those called upon to apply

ply their language to do so in such a way as to make it effective. The case of the Floyd acceptance already referred to, shows how difficult it is to bind the Government, by the acts of its officers, in the matter of contracting for and delivering its moneys; and before that case was decided, an opinion by one of my predecessors was given, sustaining the view that was afterward adopted in that case. After all, this is but an application of the general doctrine that the government of the

United States in transactions. References show the ordinarily bound by an escrow. References show the application of this doctrine in almost every conceivable shape, and also that in dealings with the Government upon contracts, there is always a safeguard, until the final acceptance by the proper officer, and a disbursement of the money. Where, by the terms of a contract for the repair of a building, it is stipulated that the material shall be of the best quality and the work performed in the best manner subject to the acceptance or rejection of the Government, the contractor is bound to furnish with the

"This case it is conceived, goes the full length to n... against...

lieve the Government, in this instance, that the Government is not doing anything in the nature of an estoppel, and in this opinion the Court says: Fraud or mistake vitiates the certificate in that as upon a final inspection and trial of this vessel it has been found that a certificate has been given, or an acceptance made, of work that did not comply with the requirements—and whether this was through fraud or